

## **Mine Safety and Health Administration**

CONTACT: Rodney Brown  
PHONE: (703) 235-1452

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### **FEDERAL MINE INSPECTORS BEGIN UNPRECEDENTED SAFETY SWEEP OF NATION'S METAL AND NONMETAL MINES Increasing Number of Mining Deaths Spur Action**

The Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) announced today it will dispatch its entire non-coal mine inspector force to all of the nation's nearly 11,000 metal and nonmetal mining operations to prevent a rising number of mining deaths. As of September 10, 50 miners in metal and nonmetal mining operations have been killed on the job compared with 34 at the same time during 1996.

This unprecedented 2-week initiative, which begins today, is being conducted to review mine safety measures and bring attention to hazardous conditions that have caused a significant increase in fatalities this year. Not since 1987 has the total number of metal and nonmetal miners killed on the job reached as high as 50 by this date.

"We are concerned about the disturbing number of mining fatalities that have occurred so far this year," said Secretary of Labor Alexis M. Herman. "I intend to use every resource at the disposal of this department to halt this upsurge of deaths in the metal and nonmetal mining industry. I have said before that American workers should not put their lives in peril for their livelihood, and I remain very much committed to that principle."

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The initiative will mobilize all available metal and nonmetal inspections, a portion of the agency's coal mine inspectors and technical and training staff. Their assignment will be to speak directly with miners and management about the types of accidents that are occurring and how to prevent them.

"We have directed a major deployment of agency personnel to address this alarming increase in mining deaths," said J. Davitt McAteer, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "We must draw the attention of every mine operator and every miner in the nation to raise the awareness level concerning this current trend of tragic accidents. We need to inform mine workers and mine managers of the hazardous conditions that have led to many of these accidents and show them how fatalities can be avoided."

Earlier this year, MSHA had expressed concern over the higher number of fatalities and responded to the problem by temporarily re-assigning inspectors to geographical areas of special concern. The agency also deployed training personnel to mine sites, conducted pertinent surveys and performed other accident prevention activities.

The agency also met with and sought the input of industry and labor leaders in an effort to find solutions to the increasing fatalities. Topics of discussion included rising production in some industry sectors and the important role of supervisors in preventing fatal accidents. Since that time, fatalities have continued to occur at a pace greater than any time in the past 10 years.

McAteer added, "We need to be vigilant and involve everyone in the industry--from the boardroom to the toolroom--to reverse this dangerous trend. Top management must be committed to worker safety and make it a top priority at each mine. That message has to be communicated to their middle management. Miners have to be committed to protecting themselves as well as their co-workers from potential hazards at their mine site."

The metal and nonmetal mining industry includes all mining operations other than coal mines. Typical operations include gold mines, lead mines, silver mines, crushed stone operations, quarries, sand and gravel pits and mills.

Accidental deaths in the metal and nonmetal mining industry had fallen from more than 200 deaths annually earlier this century. The all-time record-low of 40 fatalities in metal and nonmetal mining was set just 3 years ago, in 1994, beating the previous low of 43 deaths in 1992. Last year, non-coal mining deaths numbered 47, a total already surpassed by this year's current count of 50 deaths.

Of the 50 deaths so far this year, 44 percent have occurred at crushed stone operations, 21 percent have occurred at sand and gravel operations and 14 percent at gold mines. The primary cause of the accidental deaths have been attributed to powered haulage--meaning the victim was killed in an accident that involved some type of vehicle at the mine site--which have accounted for 40 percent of all deaths this year.

Most of the fatal accidents have occurred during routine, day-to-day duties typically carried out at mining operations. Some victims were working with equipment that was improperly maintained while others were performing certain tasks while not wearing seat or safety belts. Other victims were working in unsafe locations.

For example, one victim was shoveling material from around a tail pulley when his clothing became entangled because a guard was missing. The man was pulled into the pulley and choked. In another accident, the victim's crew had finished working in one area and had moved to another. Without informing other crew members, the victim returned to the area previously worked, and proceeded beyond barriers constructed to limit access. He was later found beneath a roof fall.

During the special effort MSHA inspectors will be speaking to workers, their supervisors and mine managers. McAteer indicated that while the inspectors who participate in this effort will issue citations for obvious violations of mine safety and health regulations and close down areas of mines where an imminent danger to working miners is evident, the objective will be to talk about the need for safety to be a fundamental part of the mining process.

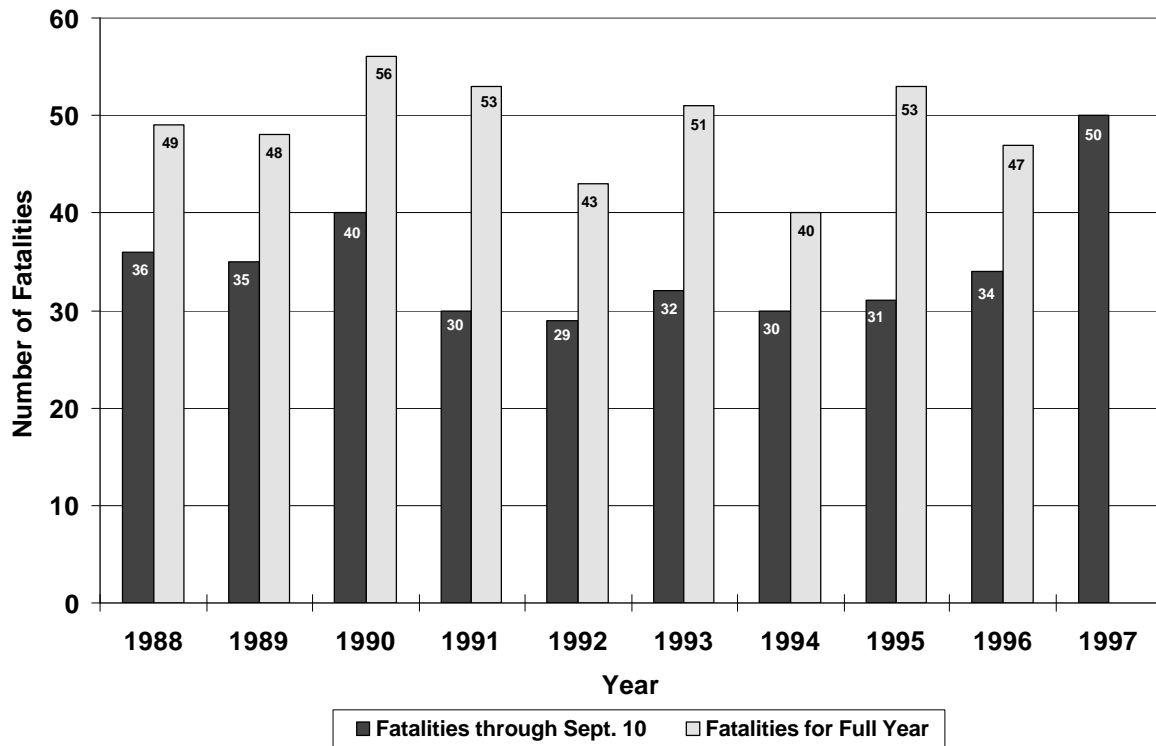
Some of the advice inspectors will be passing on to miners and mine operators include:

- Wear seat belts;
- Secure and/or block equipment when performing maintenance work;
- Conduct thorough work place and equipment examinations;
- Operate only safe, well maintained equipment;
- Lock out electrical equipment during maintenance and repair;
- Do not over-extend equipment beyond design capabilities;
- Design traffic patterns which avoid congestion;
- Ensure adequate equipment guards are in use;
- Take down or provide support for loose ground (roof); and
- Remain alert and do not work in unsafe locations.

MSHA has authority to inspect all mines in the United States for adherence to federal mine safety and health regulations. The agency also has responsibility to investigate all accidental mining deaths.

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## Metal and Nonmetal Mining Fatality Alert



### ***Mining Fatalities at Metal and Nonmetal Mines***

<b>Year</b>	<b><i>Fatalities through Sept. 10</i></b>	<b><i>Fatalities for Full Year</i></b>
1988	36	49
1989	35	48
1990	40	56
1991	30	53
1992	29	43
1993	32	51
1994	30	40
1995	31	53
1996	34	47
1997	50	

## METAL AND NONMETAL FATALITIES BY STATE

State	1997*	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	Total
Alabama			1				1
Alaska	1		1	1			3
Arizona	3	2	4		6	1	16
Arkansas		1			2		3
California	6	4	5	3	3	2	23
Colorado	1		1	1	1		4
Connecticut	1		1				2
Delaware							0
Florida	4	1	3			3	11
Georgia	1		3	3		1	8
Hawaii							0
Idaho		1		1	2	1	5
Illinois	3	2		2	2	5	14
Indiana				2		1	3
Iowa	1	1		1	1	1	5
Kansas	2				2		4
Kentucky	2	1		1	1	1	6
Louisiana		1	1				2
Maine							0
Maryland		2	1			2	5
Massachusetts	1			1			2
Michigan	1	1	2		2	1	7
Minnesota				1		1	2
Mississippi		1	1				2
Missouri	3	3	3	2	1	3	15
Montana		1	2			4	7
Nebraska				1	1		2
Nevada	4	4	7	4	2	3	24
New Hampshire							0

<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>New Mexico</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>New York</b>			<b>1</b>				<b>1</b>
<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>North Dakota</b>							<b>0</b>
<b>Ohio</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Oklahoma</b>		<b>2</b>				<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Oregon</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>				<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Puerto Rico</b>		<b>2</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>							<b>0</b>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>South Dakota</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Tennessee</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Texas</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Utah</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>Vermont</b>				<b>2</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Virginia</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Washington</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>West Virginia</b>						<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>Wyoming</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>284</b>

\* as of 9/08/97